

@@ TITLE = THE SENDING BODY

@SUBTITLE = How does the Church organize for mission?

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The two most commonly recognized forms of organization for mission are often labeled "church" and "parachurch," and some may be surprised that the <I>Mission Handbook<D> (both the 13th and 14th editions) does not catalogue the sending societies in those terms. It simply lists them alphabetically without regard to their basic ecclesiastical nature.

There is an advantage to this. It focuses on our common interests and concerns rather than our differences. It brings us closer to the spirit of Jesus' prayer in John 17.

But recognition of diversity in the way Christians organize for mission need not destroy our unity in Christ. Those who think of the denominations as being "church" and the independent and transdenominational agencies as "parachurch" will discover in this edition of the <I>Handbook<D>, about 121 of the former (denominational) and 643 of the latter (parachurch). They appear side-by-side in this same mission resource volume as significant parts of the worldwide outreach of the Body of Jesus Christ. The fact that differences are not highlighted, and that together, church and parachurch are seen as constituting a mission "team" is in itself cause for thanksgiving.

This does not mean there are no tensions. Nor is there anything new about their existence. There has always been friction between the Church and the voluntary societies which its members form among themselves for specific action. The organized body has frequently been at odds with its individual members in mission.

Perhaps it was this tug-of-war between institutional structures and the functional freedom of Christians in mission that led John R. Mott to urge Christians to "organize as if everything depended on the organization, and pray as if everything depended on prayer." But call it what you will, this tension between "order and ardor," between Church and parachurch, between the structure and the individual, is a creative force as old as Paul's encounter with

Peter in Antioch, and as troublingly contemporary as a 20th century Protestant schism.

It can best be understood, therefore, in a context of history. For "The real essence of the real Church," as Hans Kung has written, "is expressed in historical form."

@SUBHEAD = Individualism in ascendancy

Today's statistics suggest that the tides of history are running in favor of greater freedom in mission and a loosening of ecclesiastically institutionalized ties. This is an unexpected reversal of a hundred-year-long trend in North America that had been moving in precisely the opposite direction since about the middle of the 19th century. (See Earl R. MacCormac, "An Ecumenical Failure: The Development of Congregational Missions and its Influence upon Presbyterians," in the <I>Journal of Presbyterian History, <D> vol. 44, no. 4, Dec. 1966, pp. 266-285.)

In 1953, 56% of North America's Protestant career missionaries were connected to national councils of churches (U.S.A. and Canada), while 44% were more independently related. But by 1985 the figures had been startlingly reversed. Only about 12% were in denominational mission boards represented on the national councils, whereas the percentage of independents had doubled from 44% to 88%. (See <I>13th Mission Handbook, <D> p. 39). If the emerging "tent-making missionary" movement is factored in, the momentum toward individualism is quickening yet faster.

But how does this present trend compare with the broader sweep of history?

In the first century, a question came up concerning the relationship between recognized ecclesiastical authority (the Twelve) and a highly personalized, but amazingly effective, mission (Paul's), which brought forth an eloquent defense of his ministry to the Gentiles. Paul recognized the imperatives of (1) a Church connection, (2) a commissioning from the congregation in Antioch, and later, (3) the approval of the leaders in Jerusalem.

But when Paul's own authority was questioned, he based the validity of his call and mission not on the mandate of any church in Antioch, or even on the sanction of the apostles in Jerusalem, but on the

revelation of God in Jesus Christ. Only in the assurances of a commissioning beyond the power of any human organization to give, could he be so bold as to "oppose [Peter] to his face."

@SUBHEAD = Rome's <I>modus vivendi<D>

In seventh-century England, the tension between independent and church-centered outreach brought Celtic and Roman missions into head-on collision. The former were far more successful in converting Scotland and England, but the latter triumphed in organizing the Church. It was the Irish monks, singularly unfettered by diocesan controls, who largely Christianized the British Isles. But it was a bishop from Rome, Wilfred of York, who outmaneuvered them at Whitby in 663-664.

A different, but not altogether dissimilar, conflict of functional urgencies and organizational connections in the ninth century kept Cyril and Methodius dangling in mid-orbit between Constantinople and Rome, as those two powerful churches fought for control of the brothers' successful mission to the Slavs. The missionaries, however, were more interested in keeping the project indigenously Slavic than in the issue of with what church it should have its connection.

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After a thousand years of trial and error, Rome at last faced the fact that church structures and mission structures might need differing institutional forms and a flexible relationship. Beginning with the Franciscans and Dominicans in the 13th century, and the Jesuits in the 16th, the Pope began to grant autonomy from lesser ecclesiastical authority than his own to a whole multitude of missionary orders (voluntary societies for mission).

Freed from jealous ecclesiastical controls, these missionary societies exploded in outreach across the world, far beyond the borders of Christendom. It is true that the pattern of the Roman Catholic orders had its own problems. At one unforgettable point in church history, the Pope dissolved the entire Jesuit Society! But it has served admirably as a missionary model to this day.

@SUBHEAD = Protestant reformers lag behind

La Mar
Had Martin Luther not reacted against the missionary orders<-> especially the Dominicans and Franciscans,

as in his preface to Alber's <I>The Fool's Mirror...<D><->the first 250 years of Protestantism might not have been so astonishingly sterile in missionary outreach. Without a structure for missionary ministry comparable to the orders, Protestantism turned in upon itself, as a church in mission among the churched, and left the world to the untiring friars and the Jesuits.

1706

It is significant that when the Lutheran monarch Frederick IV of Denmark looked about for his first foreign missionaries in 1706, he went not to the organized church, but to the independent Pietists, and official Lutheranism thundered against the folly of a mission to savages. The voluntary mission society, supported by no single church body, remained the dominant German pattern up into the 1950's.

Anglicans, less anti-Catholic and more pragmatic than Luther, proved more flexible than the continental Lutheran and Reformed churches. They eventually allowed two different missionary societies within their one church <->the older Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, for the more establishment-minded, and a new Church Missionary Society for the more independent "evangelicals."

@SUBHEAD = An "even-tempered ... plurality"

Warren

Max Warren's article "Why Missionary Societies and Not Missionary Churches?" is a beautifully even-tempered defense of such plurality of mission structures within the unity of the Church:

"To imagine the religious societies of the eighteenth century as being in some way 'in opposition' to the Church, or even to envisage them in apposition, as being over against the Church, is to do despite to the Holy Spirit of God and to his working in history. It is a wrong interpretation of the facts... No, official leadership does not by itself constitute the Church. Nor is the central administration of a denomination <I>the<D> Church" (italics his).

ABCFM

Americans were even more innovative. Instead of one church with two missionary societies, they formed one missionary society for two still-separated churches <->the Congregationalist and Presbyterian<-> and for any others which might wish to cooperate. The famous American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, organized in 1810 after the pattern of the London Missionary Society, became the missionary agency for

both denominations. On both sides of the Atlantic, this type of parachurch structure of the voluntary mission societies turned out to be the dominant form of 19th century Protestant overseas missions.

@SUBHEAD = An ironic switch in Presbyterianism

But as early as 1837, American Presbyterians began to have second thoughts about independence in mission. A year later, the Presbyterian General Assembly tore itself in half over the issue of whether Presbyterian missions could properly be entrusted to an independent agency not under the direct control of the church.

Its liberal wing remained loyal to the parachurch society and was drummed out of the church. The conservative wing, remaining in the assembly, separated itself from the highly successful voluntary society for missions, and formed an equally successful denominational Board of Foreign Missions. By the end of the century, mainline <I>church<D> agencies, denominationally controlled, became the ascendant organizational form of missions.

The 20th century brought an ironic switch. In the 1930's <->just as the denominationally controlled mainline mission boards were proving their ability to plant flourishing younger churches around the world<-> an abrupt reversal of the trend took place, particularly in North America.

Earlier, it had been the liberals who championed the parachurch approach to mission. About a century later, around the year 1937, it was the conservatives who broke away from the denominations in ever-increasing numbers to form independent societies and to swell the ranks of what by then were being called "faith missions." A related development was the emergence of independent denominations with a strong focus on missions.

By 1960 the "center of gravity of Protestant missionary sending agencies" had shifted sharply away from the mainline agencies towards parachurch missions and independent denominations. Today the imbalance is overwhelming. Almost 90% of the full-time North American mission force, as we noted above, operates outside the councils of churches.

The mission agencies which send out across the world the greater number of missionaries are all parachurch

bodies, like Wycliff Bible Translators, or belong to independent denominations, like the Southern Baptists. These two top the list of the 25 largest. The first large traditional denomination to appear on the list, the United Methodist Board of Global Ministries, is number 20.

@SUBHEAD = Definitions without agreement

We turn now<-> somewhat reluctantly <-> from history to the harder task of groping for definitions.

Parallels from history must be treated with caution. It is easy to jump too quickly from resemblances of form and function to assumptions of identity. In the New Testament, for example, the apostles in Jerusalem were not a National Council of Churches. Nor was St. Paul working for Campus Crusade.

The heart of our problem centers around the definition of the church, as Warren suggests in the paragraph we quoted above. If no agreement can be reached on so basic a definition as that, discussion of relationships between church and parachurch will always end in frustration. Unfortunately, "church" is one of the most imprecise words in the Christian lexicon. And to add the prefix "para" to it, only makes it fuzzier.

What is a church? This is where the ambiguities begin. Witness the confusion <->both legal and ecclesiastical <->between a church, a confessional body, a denomination, a congregation, a sect and a cult. And what is a parachurch <->a voluntary society, a service agency, an electronic television program, a seminary chapel, a denominational mission agency, a faith mission, a task force? The list could go on and on.

@SUBHEAD = A second look at "church"

Not every true believer is content with John Calvin's classic definition of the "marks" of the church: faithful <I>preaching<D> and hearing of the gospel and the administration of the <I>sacraments<D> as instituted by Christ. However much one may be biased in Calvin's favor, as is the present writer, it is difficult to stop here. Once one starts to list the marks of the true church, to stop with two or to find agreement on their priority and indispensability is next to impossible. Calvin himself often added a third mark, <I>discipline<D>, which refers not only

to the church's authority, but to its moral, ethical and social dimensions.

The Salvation Army, which was originally parachurch, is now as much or more truly a church <-> albeit without the traditional sacraments <-> as some churches with sacraments but without Christian service to the poor, or others which celebrate the sacraments but have lost their moral and theological discipline.

Calvin at least was right in his willingness to distinguish between essentials and non-essentials, and in his emphatic warnings, on the one hand, against schismatic temper <-> which is the besetting sin of the parachurch <-> and, on the other hand, against ecclesiastical arrogance <-> which is an endemic fault in the churches. The latter he rejected as "monarchy among ministers," citing Paul's claim to equality with the Twelve.

Does this suggest that ultimately there is no difference between church and parachurch? Not quite, but it does raise questions. Is the church a worshiping fellowship of believers? So are many parachurch organizations. Is the parachurch a service agency? So are some churches. Is the church where the Word of God is faithfully preached? Independent missions do that. So do seminaries. And television evangelists.

@SUBHEAD = Too big to be boxed in

Perhaps the Church of Jesus Christ is too big to be boxed in by Catholic orders or Protestant reformers. There are always new dimensions which we may have overlooked <-> the exercise of the Holy Spirit's gifts, the fulfillment of God's missionary purpose, the manifestation of his Kingdom, the fellowship of the saints, the school of discipleship, the place of prayer. Like his person and his work, the Body of Christ defies adequate description in human language.

Long before Calvin's time, Ignatius of Antioch, bishop of the church which less than 60 years earlier had sent Paul on his first missionary journey, left us a memorable one-line definition of the Church. He was a strong defender of the power of bishops, but in a letter written on his way to martyrdom in Rome about 107 A.D., he returned to the basics. "Where Jesus Christ is, there is the Church," he said simply.

There is an echo of the same sentiment in Irenaeus a generation later. "Where the Church is, there is the Spirit of God; and where the Spirit of God is, there is the Church and every grace." It was an age closer to the apostles than ours, and perhaps truer to the apostolic concept of the Church. Who will deny to parachurch agencies the presence and power of Christ and his Spirit?

Then what is the real difference between church and parachurch?

Some say the difference lies in the fact that the Church is the <I>whole<D> Body of Christ, whereas parachurch agencies are never more than incomplete parts. But what church today claims to be the whole Body? There is only one Head <->Christ. All the other parts are precisely that <->parts<-> the parachurches no less parts of the one Body than the churches, and each member of the Body no less interdependent than all the other members.

@SUBHEAD = No more reprehensible

This puts church/parachurch tensions in a different, less pejorative perspective. It is unfortunately true that there is as much organizational tension between the churches themselves as between church and parachurch, and one is no more reprehensible than the other.

Others say that the difference is a matter of recognition and acceptance by some higher authority. If so, by what authority? The word "church" derives from the Greek <I>kuriakon<D> and simply means "that which belongs to the Lord." This could apply equally well to church or parachurch. Paul's favorite word for the church, <I>ekklesia<D>, from which the English language derives "ecclesiastic," means "a community" or "a called gathering," and Paul never tires of pointing out that the calling is from God, not from any human source.

Were not the Protestant denominations themselves non-churches <->or worse yet, anti-churches<-> to some Catholics before Vatican II? But what Protestant denomination would accept the label "parachurch" as if its churchness were of an inferior order? To strict anabaptists, is not any church organization beyond the worshiping congregation a parachurch? But what presbytery considers itself to be a lower

governing body than a congregation?

On a larger scale, is not the World Council of Churches a parachurch agency? Yet in a strange reversal of roles, membership in such a parachurch organization is considered by some to be the authentication of a church. At the other end of the organizational spectrum from the WCC is the fast-growing voluntarism of the "tentmaking missionaries." This is a model so old that it traces back to the Apostle Paul, but so recently revived and organizing so rapidly that for the first time this edition of the <I>Handbook<D> (No.14) will attempt to track it. (See <I>14th Mission Handbook<D>, "Tentmaking Today," p. ____).

@SUBHEAD = Pathways to cooperation

Despite these ambiguities of definition, however, and beyond the confusion they create, there does remain a feeling of difference between church and parachurch. But if history leaves us with tensions, and if our definitions<-> even with the guidance of Scripture<-> lead us to no Christian consensus, how do Christians deal with this difference?

One helpful approach is Ralph Winter's "warp-and-woof" analogy, exposed in a series of pathfinding articles on "The Two Structures of Mission." In them he borrows terms from the social sciences and describes a church as a <I>modality<D>, and a parachurch agency as a <I>sodalilty.<D> He uses <I>modality<D> to define the general, formal, inclusive structure of a church, as embracing all the Christians within it<-> young or old, male or female, clergy or laity<-> irrespective of their differing functions. It is a "full community," charged with declaring and doing the whole counsel of God.

<I>Sodalities,<D> however, are voluntary functional groups, organized for a special task or purpose. They "do not by themselves constitute a self-perpetuating community." Since they do not pretend to be the "full community," they can serve several communities, cutting across the lines of church modalities. Such would be a missionary order like the Jesuits <->within the papal modality, but transcending diocesan episcopal modalities.

A Protestant parallel would be the interdenominational missionary societies, such as the early American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions,

ch. 4 - modality (inclusive, non-voluntary structure)
parachurch - Sodalilty (voluntary, non-inclusive structure)

serving both Congregationalism and Presbyterianism, or the more modern "faith" missions.

@SUBHEAD = Ambiguities persist

Winter's irenic thesis is that the Church needs both modalities and sodalities, as woven cloth needs both a warp and a woof. But he admits that even this analysis does not clear away the ambiguities. Sodalities merge into modalities, as specialized voluntary societies sometimes become denominations. And churches <-> particularly first-generation churches <-> often look and act like sodalities. In fact, humanly speaking, the whole Church on earth is a voluntary society.

Another extremely valuable survey of the problem is a handbook on church-parachurch relations prepared by the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, entitled <I>Cooperating in World Evangelization.<D> Its identification and description of five major areas of friction is particularly helpful: (1) "dogmatism about non-essentials," (2) "the threat of conflicting authorities," (3) "strained relationships," (4) "rivalry between ministries," and (5) "suspicion about finances." The handbook analyzes each area of tension in some detail, with a careful balance of church and parachurch perspectives.

Better than that, it goes on to suggest approaches to mutual understanding and cooperation. "When two groups (one church, one parachurch) want the same people, the same programs, the same dollars and the same authority, a clash is inevitable and both ministries suffer." No one organizational pattern of relationship will solve all the tensions, but cooperation is absolutely imperative. Speaking from the parachurch side of the tension, the Lausanne Committee was "largely in agreement with the statement by John Stott that 'independence of the church is bad, cooperation with the church is better, service as an arm of the church is best'."

@SUBHEAD = More study needed

A similar study of the issues should be undertaken by the churches. Much thinking remains to be done about the doctrine of the Church. A better definition of ecumenics is needed than "interchurch relations". Until the churches take parachurch ministries more seriously, they will continue to spin in their own

circles while growth passes them by.

There was a time when national Christian councils included delegated, voting representation from inter-denominational and independent agencies. Then they became "national councils of churches," and with the narrowing of the base came a limiting of vision and a diminishing of mission. Perhaps the churches need both Christian councils and councils of churches<-> with the two in constant conversation and interaction, one focused on outreach, the other on relationships.

None of the above ways of approaching the tensions will bring in the millenium, when "the lion shall lie down with the lamb." Lambs are not even lying down with lambs at present <-> they are all acting like lions. But there are ways of reducing the tension.

In the absence of a final solution, I suggest a few guidelines for consideration. The Far East would call them proverbs. Like the laws of grace in the Bible<-> which are neither all grace nor entirely law<-> proverbs seek a balance of wisdom that is open to seemingly contradictory facts. These will not dispel the tensions, but they may help Christians to deal with them. Each law has two parts<-> one speaks to the church, the other to the parachurch.

@SUBHEAD = Lights to walk by

Lights
<I>First:<D> "Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely." (That is for the church). But freedom also corrupts, and absolute freedom corrupts absolutely. (That is for the parachurch). This is the law of original sin.

<I>Second:<D> Churches don't grow; their parts do. But only the relation of the parts to the whole prevents growth from becoming deformity. This is the law of the body and the cells.

<I>Third:<D> "Let the church be the church," and the parachurch, parachurch. When the church thinks everything it does is "mission," it is thinking like a parachurch. When a parachurch thinks it must do everything, it is acting like a church. This is the law of defined responsibility.

And <I>finally:<D> "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels... and... have all faith so that I can remove mountains... And though I bestow all my

goods to feed the poor... and have not love, it profits me nothing."

This is the law of love. It cannot be divided into two parts. Like the Spirit who gives it, it holds the parts together.